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ABSTRACT

Nine former interns were hired to teach at six schools in the same system in which they had completed a year-long internship. Three student teachers were also hired to teach in three of those schools. Principals of the six schools were interviewed on their reasons for hiring these new teachers and their thoughts on the internship program. None of the principals thought that the internship was the specific reason an individual was hired; the personality of the individual was cited by some of the principals as being more important than the type of preparation program completed. Personality included attitude, ability to teach, flexibility, and maturity. The internship was seen as an advantage only if all other attributes of the candidates were equal. However, being in the school for a full year was seen as a strength. According to principals, interns were as well prepared as or better prepared than student teachers. While the internship year was viewed as being extremely valuable, there was some concern that the additional year and increased financial demands would discourage students from entering the program. (JD)

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Principals' Perceptions of The Effect of a Year-Long Internship on First-Year Teaching Performance:

"They Really Get to Know What is Going On"

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Principals' Perceptions of The Effect of a Year-Long Internship on First-Year Teaching Performance: "They Really Get to Know What is Going On"

This phase of the research focused on the perceptions of the principals employing interns as first-year teachers. Nine former interns were hired to teach at six schools in the same school system in which they had completed their internships. Three student teachers were also hired to teach in three of those same schools.

Participants

To facilitate description of the findings, the following pseudonyms have been established for the six schools:

Adams High School *- One male intern who completed the internship at Adams was hired the following year to teach at Adams. The intern's background in computers facilitated establishment and operation of the computer labs at the school. The school is an inner-city school with 740 students and 49 faculty members. Approximately 65% of the students receive free or reduced lunches. The principal had held that position in that school for nine years.*

Bradley High School *- Three female interns who completed the internship at Bradley were hired the following year to teach at Bradley. One female student teacher with no previous experience at Bradley also taught there. The school serves a middle- to upper-middle class population with a large percentage of college-bound students. The school enrollment was 1340, with a faculty of 75. The principal had been there as principal for ten years.*

Hamilton High School *- A female student teacher who student taught in the school was hired along with a male intern with no previous experience in the school. The intern, with industrial experience, was hired to teach in the vocational program. The school serves a suburban-rural population which the principal described as "average" or*

primarily middle-class. The school enrolled 1129 students with a faculty of 62 teachers. The principal had been in charge there for 14 years.

***Webster High School** - The new teachers mirror those at Hamilton: a female student teacher with experience in the school, and a male intern without such experience. The male was hired in mid-year after he completed an interim assignment in another school. The school, with 670 students and 54 faculty members, is an urban school serving a varied population. The principal was completing his first year as principal there but had been in administration for 11 years.*

***Rush High School** - Two male former interns and one female student teacher were hired at Rush. None had previous experience in the school. Rush is an inner-city school serving generally a lower-class population (90% of the students receive free or reduced-price lunches). The principal had served there for seven years.*

***Church Elementary School** - One female intern was hired to teach at Church. She had no previous experience there. Church is an urban school serving a varied population tending toward lower-middle and lower class economically. The female principal had five years experience as administrator in the school of 344 students and 22 faculty members.*

Procedures

In the spring of 1990, principals of the six schools were interviewed by two faculty members of the College of Education, using a semi-structured interview format to obtain information about the performance of the first-year teachers, interns and student teachers, during their initial year of full-time teaching. Interviews were all tape-recorded and later typed to facilitate analysis. The two faculty members independently analyzed the interview transcripts to summarize the principals' responses to the interview questions. They later collaborated to organize their results into meaningful topic areas.

Findings

Influences on Principals' Hiring Decisions

All of the six principals had a choice in hiring their interns and student teachers. Five of the principals were aware that the individuals had been interns, and the sixth indicated it had probably been mentioned.

Having completed the internship did not automatically give the individuals an advantage in being hired, according to the principals. Principals generally tended to hire individuals based on their own judgment. For the interns and student teachers with previous (successful) experience in their schools, the principals' personal knowledge of the teachers' past performance was the biggest key to their being hired. If the principal had not personally had an opportunity to supervise the individual, the recommendation of another administrator or a teacher whom the principal knew and respected was heavily weighted.

None of the principals thought that the preparation was the specific reason an individual was hired, although the program may have provided the opportunity for them to become aware of the teacher's abilities. The personality of the individual (or some aspect of the personality) was cited by some of the principals as being more important than the type of preparation program they had completed. Personality included attitude, ability to teach, and maturity. Maturity was defined by one principal as including the teacher's demeanor, not just chronological age. What may happen incidentally is that a higher level of commitment to teaching will be characteristic of the interns because only students who are very motivated to teach will elect to undertake the internship program with its additional year and the added expense.

Some teachers were hired because they had specific abilities or previous experience needed for their teaching assignments. One individual was hired because he had a background in computers, two others because they had backgrounds in industry.

In terms of future hiring decisions, two principals indicated that interns would have a slight edge. One would consider the internship an advantage if he knew and spoke to the supervising teacher. The fourth principal thought the internship could be an advantage but only if all other attributes of the candidates were equal. Two principals maintained that it was the personality of the individual rather than the preparation program that made the difference. They tend to rely on their own judgment, based on their years of administrative experience, when it comes to recognizing those talents or abilities in applicants. As one of the principals expressed it, she would have hired the intern regardless of her preparation program; the fact that the person had been through the internship program was "just icing on the cake."

Maturity, Experience, and Flexibility

Maturity and experience were valued by some of the other principals. One principal commented on the maturity and previous work experience of the intern as setting her apart from student teachers but thought her success was due primarily to her personality rather than her preparation. Two other principals specifically mentioned maturity as an asset of their respective interns. One of the other principals, referring to older people entering the profession, said that while age was not supposed to differentiate, "hopefully a 35 year old has more maturity, based on my experience. I can think of several. In fact, I can't think of one that wasn't successful."

Two principals expressed a preference for new teachers who did not have a lot of experience in other areas because they were more flexible. The principal at Adams thought people who had some experience had a slight edge, but with too much experience they became set in their ways. He perceived the year of internship as a year of experience but also as a learning experience. The principal at Rush (who had an intern with classroom management problems) stated a preference for young teachers whom he could train. He also noted that individuals who had been out of school for some time before coming into teaching had unrealistic expectations because education and society

had changed considerably since they had been in school. This principal had supervised another intern, from an experimental program in previous years, who was also older and had experience in military service. The principal had hired that intern and been satisfied with his performance.

The principal at Rush commented more positively about the second intern and the student teacher currently in his employ stating that "They teach more of my style, I guess." The student teacher was described as being very rigid. In fact, the principal had been telling her she could "loosen up just a little bit," but the principal didn't perceive her rigidity as a problem. It appears that the principal was basing his judgment more on the style and performance of the individual rather than chronological age or experience, as he stated.

Overall Quality of the Preparation

In commenting on the preparation program of the interns, the principals described the interns as "prepared," "extremely well prepared," "very well prepared," and "almost a second year teacher." The two principals who had supervised the teachers as interns were very positive about them. One stated, "two of the three were probably the strongest candidates that I have ever evaluated since I have been principal here." The other commented that the individual "worked with a very strong supervising teacher who acclimated him to a number of situations that he would be facing . . . .he has handled them well." The principals who employed the three student teachers as first-year teachers were also satisfied with their preparation.

Strengths of the Internship Program

Although having been through an internship would not automatically give a candidate preference for a teaching position, five of the six principals did think being in the school a full year was an advantage. It provided a "better sense of what it's all about" or "a better overall picture." The internship year offered opportunities not usually available to student teachers for a broad base of experiences: participation in conferences,

long-range planning, field trips, extracurricular activities. (Interns) "get involved in so many extra activities that many times the student teacher just will not or feels uncomfortable getting into because they're not sure if they should or not." "There are so many other things that you are into that you have to do, other than just going to the class and teaching. There are other responsibilities . . . (such as) activities clubs or homerooms and things such as that, whereas you generally don't get that in the student teaching. That is what school is all about."

Because interns are in the school the full year, another advantage is their being "thought of as much as a resident teacher . . . . they are really staff. The kids perceive them as staff and respond to them as staff." Being in the school from the beginning to the end also provided the student with opportunity to see how the classroom teacher established classroom management and discipline procedures in the fall and carried them through. The Bradley principal, who had hired his former interns, commented that interns are as well prepared or better than student teachers because of the full year internship. He went on to explain that student teachers spend only part of the year in the classroom. They may come only during the spring, after such procedures are already in place and working, and not learn how to initiate them. Student teachers are also frequently less well prepared for teaching because they are assigned to average or above average classes while student teaching, which is not what they will probably be given as first-year teachers.

The Bradley principal reported an advantage to the fifth year program was that one intern had been "weeded out" during the internship. If the individual had only experienced student teaching, the person might have been able to manage to stay in the program; the length of the internship made obvious the individual's inability to plan ahead and keep up with the daily demands of teaching, even on the less-than-full-time basis of the internship.

Although not unique to the internship program, one principal cited a teacher candidate's need for inner city experiences "for them to just see the kind of things that are going on. I really feel sometimes that public education gets the wrong end of everything because only the bad PR gets out. Your program probably helps PR for public education because you are putting them out there to see how these things are and what they are all about and how they work."

Only one principal did not perceive any strengths in the internship program. Another, employing both interns and student teachers, reported that both were well prepared and that he had not noticed a difference between them.

Weaknesses of the Internship Program

The weaknesses of the internship program cited by the principals were varied. While the internship year was viewed as being extremely valuable, three of the principals expressed an administrative concern that the additional year and increased financial demands would discourage students from entering the program. Another principal expressed concern that when teachers were in demand, there might be difficulty in providing teachers to meet that demand because of the extra year in the preparation program. One principal simply stated that he did not perceive any weaknesses.

Adjustment and Problems

Each of the principals said they had received positive reports from others about both the student teachers and interns. Most of the interns and student teachers were reported as getting along very well in their relationships with students, teachers, parents, and supervisors.

One of the interns was reported as having a major problem with classroom management. The intern was employed in an inner-city school after interning in a middle- to upper-middle-class suburban school. The principal commented that the intern was as well prepared (knowledge) as anyone in the school, "he just has a hard time sometimes getting it over." The principal indicated that the many years the individual

had been employed in industry probably led him to be less flexible and less able to adjust to the demands of teaching than younger beginning teachers. The principal did, however, refer to a former intern who had been in his school (who was also older and starting a second career in teaching after having served in the military service) who had done well in his school. The current intern, while employed in an inner city school, had done his internship at a suburban school, as had the student teacher who was performing well and was described by the principal as being "very rigid, right down the line."

It was reported to another principal that one intern was overlooking or not sensitive to a problem (profanity), but after making the intern aware of the problem he was improving. The principals also commented positively on the teachers' openness to suggestions.

One student teacher was still adjusting to her status as a teacher and putting the proper distance between herself and her students. Favoritism in her treatment of students had caused comment by students and parents. This was not viewed as a reflection of the preparation program but as the immaturity of the individual.

The principal at Bradley noted that most of the problems were addressed during the internship year because the interns "had such strong cooperating teachers and they were here from the beginning . . . . They were able to learn from their cooperating teachers and picked up the very strong instructional techniques. They already had some and were already aware of some, but they developed those further by watching their cooperating teachers and watching some other public teachers."

Additional Insights

The two principals who were most supportive of the internship program were the two who had hired the interns who served the internships in their respective schools the previous year. Principals who had hired the interns they supervised tended to consider the internship year as the first year of teaching. Interviewers had to become aware of

this and, at times, had to clarify to be sure the principals focused on the first year of full-time teaching in their comments.

Supervision

Both principals who had hired their former interns reported that the burden of supervising them during the first year of teaching was considerably less than for other first-year teachers. The major task of supervision occurred during the internship year so that when the individual became a first-year teacher, the investment of the principal's time during the internship year paid off. Principals (or their designees) are required to do two formal observations as part of the state plan for evaluation of Probationary (first-year) teachers. They are also required to do two formal observations during each of the three subsequent Apprentice years. A third evaluation each of those years is done by someone other than the principal.

The Bradley principal noted that evaluation of the interns during the internship year added to the load of the principal, but he also noted that when the interns taught in his school the subsequent year "it was well worth it . . . . the fact that I had three people that I feel comfortable with and that I can plug right in . . . . It paid off extremely well." Both principals also commented that the interns had been placed with very capable cooperating teachers and had benefitted greatly from their contact with very competent professionals.

The Bradley principal also thought the internship program served another purpose because one of the interns originally assigned to his school the previous year had been "weeded out" during the internship year. The intern was not able to sustain the effort needed to successfully complete a year-long internship. His feeling was that if the individual had only had to complete the traditional student teaching experience, his weaknesses might not have surfaced and he would have gone on a full-time teaching position with which he would have been even less capable of coping.

In the school where two interns and a student teacher were employed, none of whom had previous experience in the school, the principal was pleased with the performance of one intern and the student teacher, dissatisfied with the other intern. The two performing satisfactorily were described as being more rigid and more structured, and the principal commented that "they teach more of my style, I guess." While the principal expressed a preference for young teachers with little or no other career experience, he also related his satisfaction with another intern he had subsequently employed a few years earlier. That intern was retired from a military career before entering teaching.

Differences are reflections of individuals. One principal who had no prior experience with the intern but who had hired student teachers with student-teaching experience in his school was very positive about both teachers. The other principal in a similar situation indicated the former student teacher had experienced "some difficulty separating herself from the students." This was, he thought, at least partially attributable to her youth, but indicated that the young woman experienced some problems with students and a few parents as a result. The intern at that school, and the intern and student teacher at the other school, did not experience similar problems. Both principals expressed satisfaction with both interns and student teachers.

Summary

Most principals agreed that there were advantages of being in the school for a full school year internship. Being in the school for a full year gives the intern an opportunity to see the full range of school activities and the progression through the year. The intern also has more opportunities to participate in teaching-related tasks than student teachers.

Hiring decisions would still be made, for the most part, based on the judgment of the principal. What principals seem to be saying is that it is the individual, not the preparation program, that is important. The internship would be an advantage only when other factors were balanced.

Principals differ in their preferences for maturity in teacher applicants. The internship year poses an additional evaluation burden on the principal, but this is worthwhile if the intern is hired to teach in that school. Administrators have concerns regarding the added length of the preparation program and the increased cost due to the delay in entering the profession and lack of compensation during that year. The most supportive principals are those who hired their own former interns.